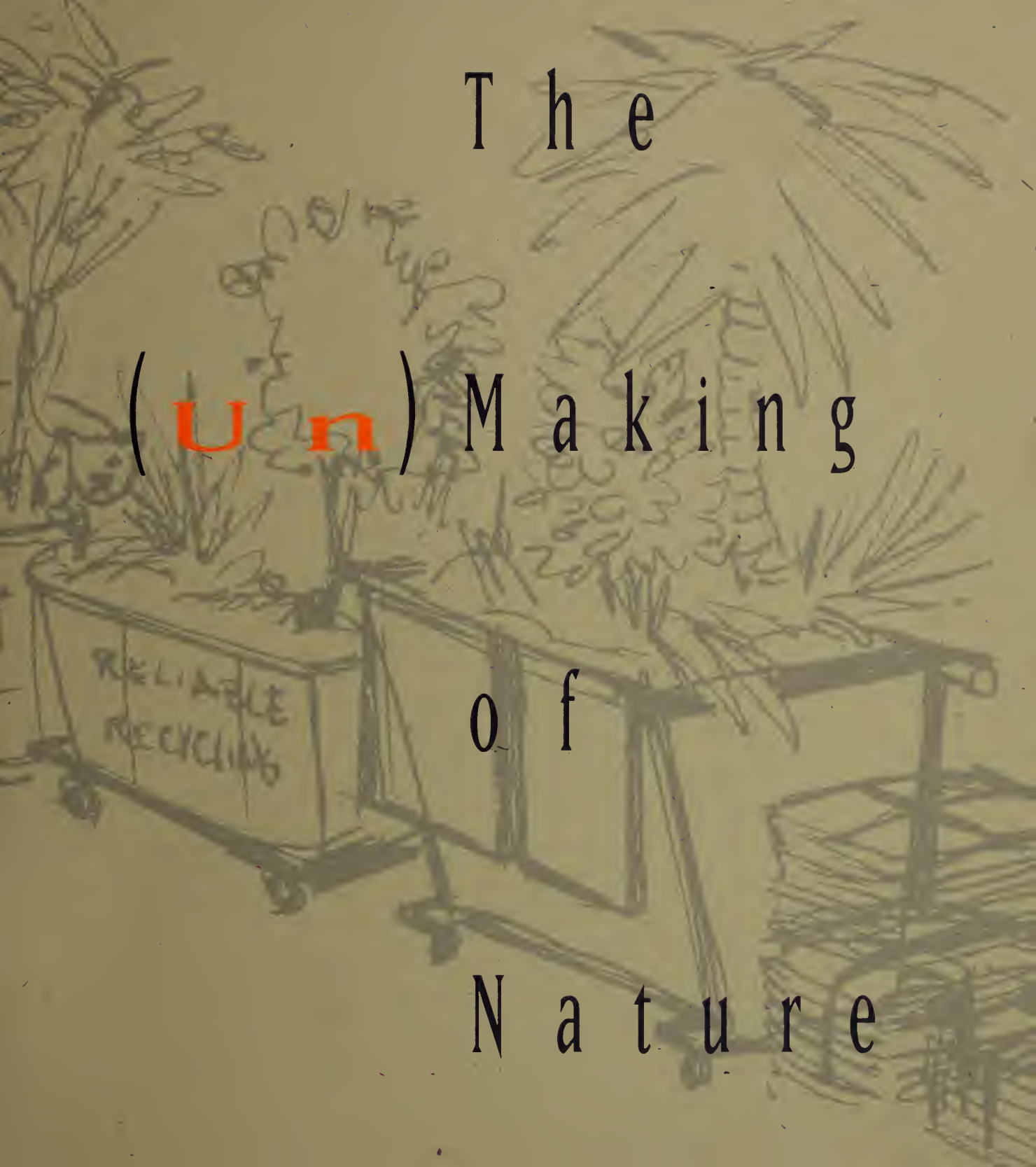

The (Un)Making of Nature

The Whitney Museum of American Art,
Downtown at Federal Reserve Plaza,
is funded by a partnership of Park Tower
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This exhibition was organized by the following
Helena Rubinstein Fellows in the 1989–90
Whitney Museum Independent Study Program:
Julia Einspruch, Elizabeth Finch, James
Marcovitz, Helen Maleswarth, and Lydia Yee.

The (Un)Making of Nature
is a two-part exhibition.

Whitney Museum of American Art
at Philip Morris
New York, New York
May 16–July 11, 1990

Whitney Museum of American Art
Downtown at Federal Reserve Plaza
New York, New York
May 31–July 27, 1990

The exhibition at the Whitney Museum Downtown
will travel to the Whitney Museum of American Art,
Fairfield County, Stamford, Connecticut.
October 12, 1990–January 5, 1991

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Opposite: Mark Dion and William Schefferine,
drawing for *Under the Verdant Carpet:*
The Dreams of Mount Koch, 1990

Cover: detail

The (Un)Making of Nature

Julia Einspruch
Helen Molesworth

The reinvestigation of nature in contemparary art signals a larger cultural shift in aur attitude taward nature at the close of the twentieth century. Indeed, we are constantly reminded of the enviranmental crisis by staggering statistics which indicate that without drastic madifications in the way we live, we may very well see the end af nature. With the rapid depletion of the earth's resources and the almast unbridled advancement of technology, it is lagical to conclude that nature will saan be eclipsed by the vague yet omnipotent force we have created.

As nature's physical presence continues ta erade—as Brazilian rain farests are defaliated and the Hudsan River is polluted with industrial waste—nature has understandably become this year's *cause célèbre*. Nonetheless, this enviranmental cancern goes beyond mere fashion; it indicates a desire to recover nature nat anly in aur physical warld but alsa in aurselves.

This exhibition attempts to onswer twa fundamental questians: what is nature and what is our relationship ta it? The artists' respanses are as complex as the problems at hand, presenting a multiplicity af pasitians and appraaches ta imaging and imagining nature in the 1990s.

Many of the artists featured in this exhibitian are taa yaung ta have participated in the environmental mavement af the 1960s or the Earthwarks prajects af the 1970s. Yet their works reveal an acute awareness af the natural warld, accampanied by a new set of relatianships ta the landscape and nature. Unlike the sense of grandeur and scale that accampanied the Earthwarks mavement, much af this new art attempts ta trap ar canfine nature in hermetic cantainers, treating parts of the earth in a preciaus ar archival manner symptamatic af the fear that we are lasing or have already last aur tactile and sensary relationship ta the land. Other works investigate how our contemparary understanding of nature is a praduct af images, many af which are generated by the media. These warks deconstruct such images while simultaneausly trying to create a "new" image that incarparates both our desires and our given reality. Finally, several artists directly engage the environmental crisis in their warks. However, they differ fram their predecessars in nat farmulating comprehensive solutians ta the prablems. These artists instead try ta use art as a mobilizing farce by bringing the political realities af the glabal eca-crisis inta a museum setting.

In assembling this graup af works, the curators have farmulated diverse responses ta the questians the artists raise. The tradition of landscape painting and its recent reemergence are addressed, far example, through an effart ta clarify technalogy's rale in aur perception of the sublime in nature. It becames clear, however, that many artists have bypassed technalagy, appraaching nature in a more persanal way, primarily thraugh fantasy and fetishism. The idea af a personal relationship with nature also leads to a related issue: the desire ta contral nature. Finally, artists whose warks explicitly engage the environmental crisis are discussed in an essay which advacates activism, reinfarcing the hape that direct invalvement will engender a new, more respectful association with nature.

The strategies af bath the artwork and the catalague essays effect what we have called "The (Un)Making of Nature"—a decanstructian af the traditianal canceptians of nature and a simultaneaus canstructian of a more viable relatianship ta it. In this manner, we hape ta create an arena in which these pressing issues can be investigated.

The Sublime Today:

Reconfigurations of the Landscape

Julia Einspruch
James Marcovitz

The emergence of American landscape pointing in the early nineteenth century marked American art's coming of age: artists no longer sought to emulate European precedents, but instead found what they considered to be a unique American aesthetic based on the New World's boundless vistas. American landscape painting, particularly the Hudson River School, nevertheless remained under the influence of the European notion of the sublime, as developed by Edmund Burke and Immanuel Kont.

According to Kant, beauty creates harmony by putting our faculties at ease, while the sublime produces a state of agitation, at once exalting and threatening to our very being through the presentation of awesome forms and infinite spaces. In its development by American painters, the sublime was transformed into what Barbara Novak has termed a "para-religion" of nature, God, and man: the landscape became a vehicle of transcendental experience.

Contemporary American artists interested in landscape reject such experience as myth. For certain artists in this exhibition, landscape is never unmediated but always enmeshed in codes of meaning. Indeed, several artists, rather than deal directly with nature, use the imaging strategies and technologies of mass media to investigate landscape as a cultural category. In so doing, they suggest a contemporary reconfiguration of the sublime, one created, as it were, through special effects.

With an avid interest in spectacular events in nature, Jack Goldstein evokes the more theatrical aspects of nineteenth-century landscape painting. *Untitled* (1985), a hyperrealistic image of cloud-covered volcanic mountains erupting into a deep blue sky, is in one sense not far removed from the dramatic subjects of Frederic Edwin Church. However, Goldstein's paintings are composed from photographs and airbrushed to effect the rather lurid, deeply saturated hues of the cinematographic technicolor image. Goldstein in fact refers to these paintings as "movie-sets that showcase special effects as edited from a world narrative." No primary experience of nature is possible, for Goldstein presents a nature already constructed technologically as an image. The sublime here is evoked not through an experience of triumphant unity with nature but through an ambivalent encounter with the deadly seductions of technology.

If Goldstein "technologizes" the sublime, Laura Emrick's and John Pfahl's treatments of the landscape conventionalize it. In *Stolen Horizon* (1990), Emrick frames a photographic image of a snow-covered mountain in a pair of car windows. The very emblem of the sublime, an awesome chain of jagged mountain peaks, is here contained and conventionalized, since it is viewed through the car windows. John Pfahl's photographs, shot from television programs such as *Fantasy Island* and the PBS series *Masterpiece Theater*, present yet another mediated relationship to nature. The

Jack Goldstein, *Untitled*, 1985

April Gornik, *One*, 1986

images look as if they belong to the tradition of fine art landscape photography, printed as they are in black and white on delicate platinum-palladium paper. However, these "video landscapes," as Pfahl calls them, cause the viewer to confront natural forms through the intermediary of a television screen. The sublime is thus reduced to the mundane experience of a television show.

With its endless expanse of seascape, April Gornik's painting *One* (1986) is a nostalgic evocation of the nineteenth-century landscape tradition. As in the works of Thomas Cole and Frederic Church, *One* simultaneously intimidates the viewer with its vast proportion and moody atmosphere and invites a closer examination of curious details. The water, with its gently undulating surface, remains mysteriously undisturbed by the foreboding sky above. Most striking, however, are the enigmatic patches of light which emanate from the horizon and are reflected on the water's surface through the cracks in the billowing clouds. This mystical light, which cannot be attributed to a single source, along with the title of the painting, allude to a kind of transcendence. But the melodramatic tension between calm and storm, light and dark, so

typical af the sublime landscape, is exaggerated ta the paint of sentimentality—as if to compensate for the madern incapacity to experience a transcendental unian with nature.

Michael Cuddingtan is resigned to the disappearance af the pristine landscape untouched by technalagy. *Central Valley* (1989) is a diminutive rural view, meticulausly painted alang the battam af a huge, arched piece of scrap plywood. This picturesque image af the American farm is overwhelmed by its suppart—the chief material af hausing canstructian. The pastoral has been destroyed for the creation of tract hausing, built aut af the very material an which the miniature landscape is painted. Mareaver, the raugh, unfinished scrap af plywoad alsa negates any sense af nature's farce ar magnitude, sa that it is impassible ta register the sublime.

Untitled #11 (1987), Clegg and Guttmann's large farmat, unmanipulated Cibachrome print, presents a dramatic landscape that is partially abstructed by the silhauettes of a hydroelectric pylan and electrical wires. The wark suggests that nature and technalagy are inextricably intertwined and that it is senseless to set up a binary appasitian between them. The sky, electric blue and scattered with clauds, and the pylan, its wires surging with energy, wark in tandem ta suggest an awesome combination af farces. Within this aperatic integratian af the landscape and technalagy, Clegg and Guttmann invent a new sublime.

Underlying all these artists' warks is the realizatian that it is na langer passible to procure a pure or essential vision of the landscape. Althaugh the artists articulate their positions in terms of the sublime, they rehearse this eighteenth-century concept from the experience of the late twentieth century.

Fantasy and Fetishism in Contemporary Representations of Nature

Elizabeth Finch

Nature and culture, traditionolly understood os appasites, have never been clearly distinct. Indeed, it is thraugh culture that we experience nature: the city park, the natural history museum, the wildlife preserve. For the environmentalist Bill McKibben, nature has became sa culturally mediated that it is na langer self-contained: "We have deprived nature af its independence, and that is fatal to its meaning. Nature's independence *is* its meaning; withaut it there is nathing but us." McKibben's statement is indicative af ane aspect af contemparary opinion that has accepted, if not celebrated, the lass af nature ta culture. As a result, many contemporary artists have dismissed the use of nature both as reference and as material in their work.

Yet there are athers wha regard this dismissal as o loss. For them, merely rejecting nature as an aspect af the cultural averlaaks its central rale in human imagination and memary. These artists seek to recaver the ideo of o nature—as seporate from culture—thraugh a pracess af private identificatian. Fantasy and fetishism are two of the visual manifestations af this new appraach. Fantasy, derived from the imagination, is the surfacing of conscious and unconscious desires, aften after a period of repression. Fetishism is a highly persanal act that establishes a substitute far an object or experience considered lost.

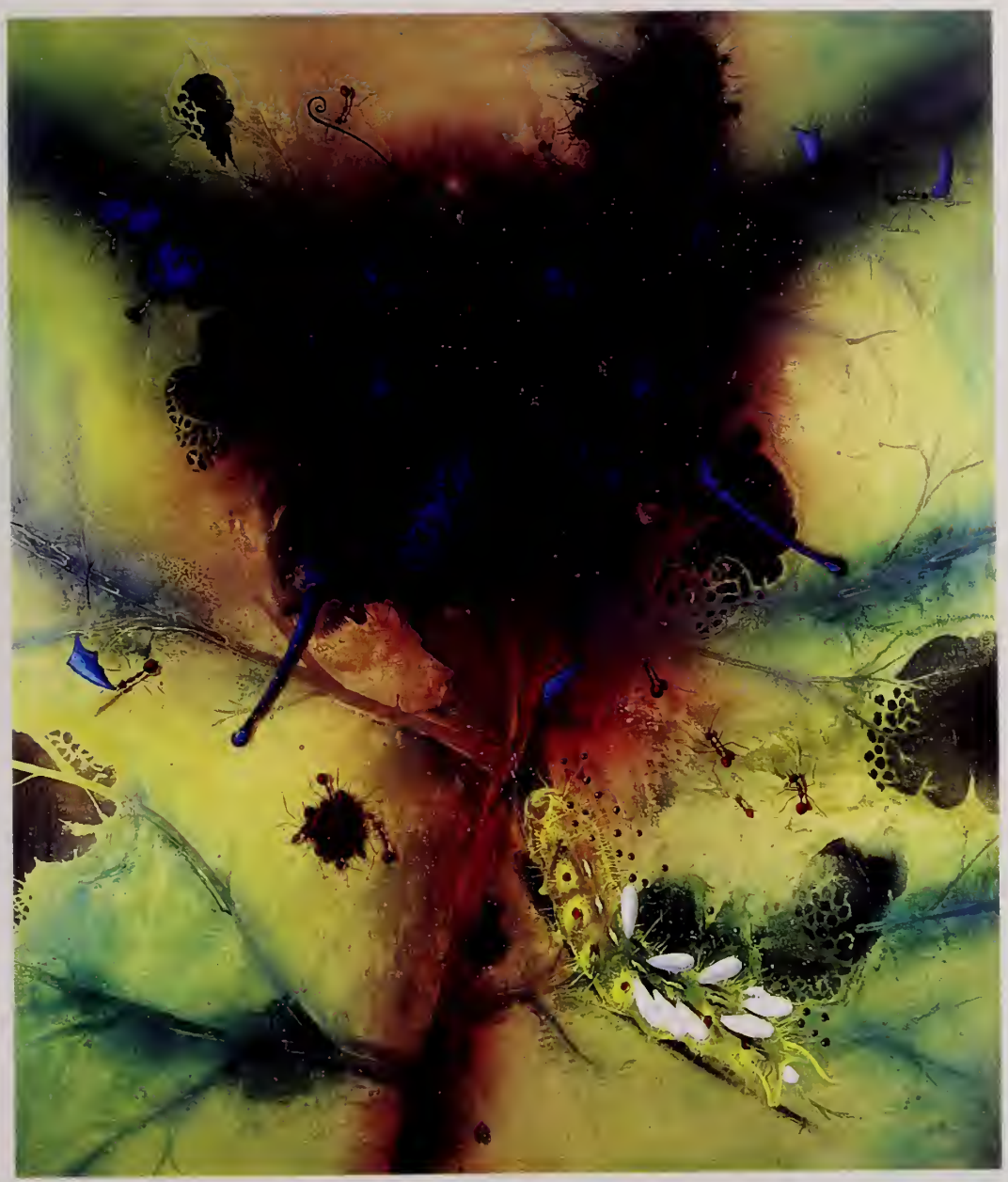
Once "last," nature cannat return in any simple farm; paradoxically, it may reappear in "unnatural," hybrid, even grotesque ways. In Alexis Rackman's painting *The Dynamics of Pawer* (1989), nature returns in horrific guise: a butterfly being cansumed by a swarming army af ants. Greatly magnified, these two insects common to our experience of the natural warld became perversely sensual, even surreal, in their vialent canfrantatian. Rockman presents nature as a fantasy af inundatian where the death af the butterfly becames the cause for the teeming life of the ants. This event, rendered in detail, indicates a certain delight in the harrar and disgust experienced in viewing one farm of life overcoming anather.

Both Petah Coyne and David Nyzia cambine natural and synthetic materials ta canstruct fantasies of nature as a site of mysterious or obscure farms and effects. In Coyne's untitled sculpture af 1989, arganic shapes embrace an unspecified or unknown nature that dominates and dwarfs the viewer. Using a variety af materials, such as clay, wire, and black sand, Cayne creates baund and twisted shapes that slip in and out af established natural farms—tree raots, cocoons, packets af debris. Suspended from the ceiling af the gallery, the precarious sculpture suggests organic farms abaut ta be unleashed. This tensian is then maintained as a permanent fantasy af an ominous natural threat. Cayne worked and reworked these campasite shapes, demonstrating her persanal investment in a fantastic nature capable of expanding beyand cultural boundaries.

Michelle Stuart, *Brookings Herbarium #41*, 1988–89

David Nyzio alsa uses natural materials ta construct a fantasy of a spectacular materializatian af nature. In *Farm* (1989), iridescent butterfly wings, meticulausly cut into squares, are pinned ta a framed panel, creating a plane of calor reminiscent of Color Field painting. Unlike the autonomous paintings it refers to, *Farm* shifts calars with the viewer's movement due to the iridescence af the butterfly wings. Narmally considered benign, the butterflies take on an aspect af terrar when used as a replacement far paint. The artist's act of cutting and placing the butterfly wings implicates him in the violence of the fantasy. And the viewer participates by walking around the work to cause the calar shifts.

Other artists return to nature by creating forms which function as fetishes far that part of nature considered lost. Michelle Stuart's *Brookings Herbarium* series (1988–89) reflects a highly personal incarparatian af natural materials. Dried plants are pressed into squares af encaustic, creating an effect which varies



Alexis Rockman, *The Dynamics of Power*, 1989

from the decaying to the fossilized. Unlike Coyne's organic and inorganic materials, Stuart's do not daminate thraugh their size. Instead, they emanate tremendaus presence through their singularity. There is a tensian here between the transience traditionally associated with the use af natural materials and the artist's persanal effort to fix and make permanent a relatian ta nature. By repeating the pracess af selecting and transforming arganic elements within a series, Stuart cantinually re-creates the fetish in a new but related farm. The personal meaning af the fetish is maintained, while the specific abject changes. Though Stuart accepts the existence of a culturally mediated nature, she daes nat suggest that it lessens ar devalues aur experience.

In the work af Brian D'Amata, the integration of preserved natural materials inta an elabarate display represents anather effart ta recover nature through bath fantasy and fetishism. In D'Amato's *Tamb far Female and Male Butterfly* (1989), two preserved butterflies are placed in a glass-franted display case directly under lenses that distart their image. Within the case, the butterflies rest an a layer af pawdered pigment that carrespands ta the colors of their wings, establishing a temparal link between their status as natural artifacts and the awareness that they will eventually decompase. D'Amata's wark evakes a fantasy of nature as a scene of death and preservatian. Rather than represent nature as a site of emerging farms, he is concerned with nature's gradual dissalution. Further, the selection and display of the butterflies as natural artifacts suggests that they functian as fetishistic replacements far a nature feared ta be last. By recantextualizing techniques used to display precious objects, D'Amato establishes the possibility af a private relatian ta nature thraugh fetishism.

Althaugh all the artists discussed address an aspect of death in nature, their work does not represent a memorial far the natural world. Rather, it reasserts the vital place that nature cantinues ta hald in aur culture. With the present threat af environmental crisis, fantasy becomes a way ta play out renewed fears, while fetishism reconciles a personal lass with the realizatian that nature can no langer be cansidered a baundless resaurce.

The Illusion of Control

Lydia Yee

In recent years there has been a heightened awareness of the environmental crisis that has permeated all levels af saciety, as demonstrated by such trends as the new fashionability of cloth diapers, the unfashionobilty af fur coats made fram the pelts af endangered species, or the marketing of organically grown produce. Environmental concerns have entered popular culture and altered cansumptian patterns. Peaple are learning ta restrain individual desires in the greater interest of the environment. Control has become a way ta pratect and preserve nature and ta deal with persanal and industrial excesses. This new cansciausness runs caunter ta the ald understanding af nature as a savage force from which we first sought protection and then saught ta canquer. Earlier attitudes taward nature thus betrayed a fear af its pawer and, subsequently, a fear of losing contral.

Much of the work done by contemporary artists addressing the enviranment and our relatianship ta nature takes up the issue af cantral and a simultaneaus lass af control—an approach that links up the old and persistent idea of noture as a potentially dangerous force with the new cancerns for the endangered enviranment. In same af the works an extreme degree af cantral is present in the farm of the containment af nature far archival purposes, which simultaneously preserves nature and neutralizes the potential threat it poses. There is a simultaneous loss of control, however, which results from the subordinatian ta an extremely rigid containment or replacement af arganic materials. The transfarmation of these materials into commodities ar simulacra denies the heterageneaus character of the natural world. In the end, cantral becames the absalute arbiter, infusing these sterile representatians (ar re-presentatians) af natural abjects with a disquieting ambience of death. Other works that display less rigaraus degrees af cantral allaw the restrained abjects ta became invalved in a dynamic that transcends cantainment, thus relinquishing a measure af cantral. Such warks recagnize that cantral is aften just an inventian ta help arder and make sense af things and to mask our loss of contral. Ultimately, attempts ta cantrol nature are aften illusory, situated in the realm af the imaginary rather than in reality.

Vincent Shine's hyperreal plastic simulations of plant life function as discreet reminders of the hamagenizing effect af cantemparary culture. Shine fabricates repraductians af several plants, including papyrus and mulberry, in excruciating detail, fram such synthetic campounds as neoprene and vinyl acetate. To the unsuspecting viewer these fragile plant farms seem to be specimens preserved for archival purposes. But as the viewer discovers their synthetic canstitution, contradictory feelings arise in response ta this encroaching plostic technalagy. Technology has enabled us to extend our control over nature and calanize its regions. Remaking the natural out of the synthetic is a means af maintaining invariability and of ensuring against deviatian. Nature is, therefore, bath cantained and replaced. This averregulation, hawever, leads to a loss of cantral: plastic technalagies eradicate the genetic diversity af distinct species,

Vincent Shine, *Untitled (Blue Stamen)*, 1989

a process that echaes the technalogical leveling effect af a seamless plastic existence within culture. Natural artifacts are naw campased of the same synthetic materials that are repeatedly faund throughout the realm af culture. Nature and culture are bath similarly subdued and transformed by the pervasive presence of technalagy.

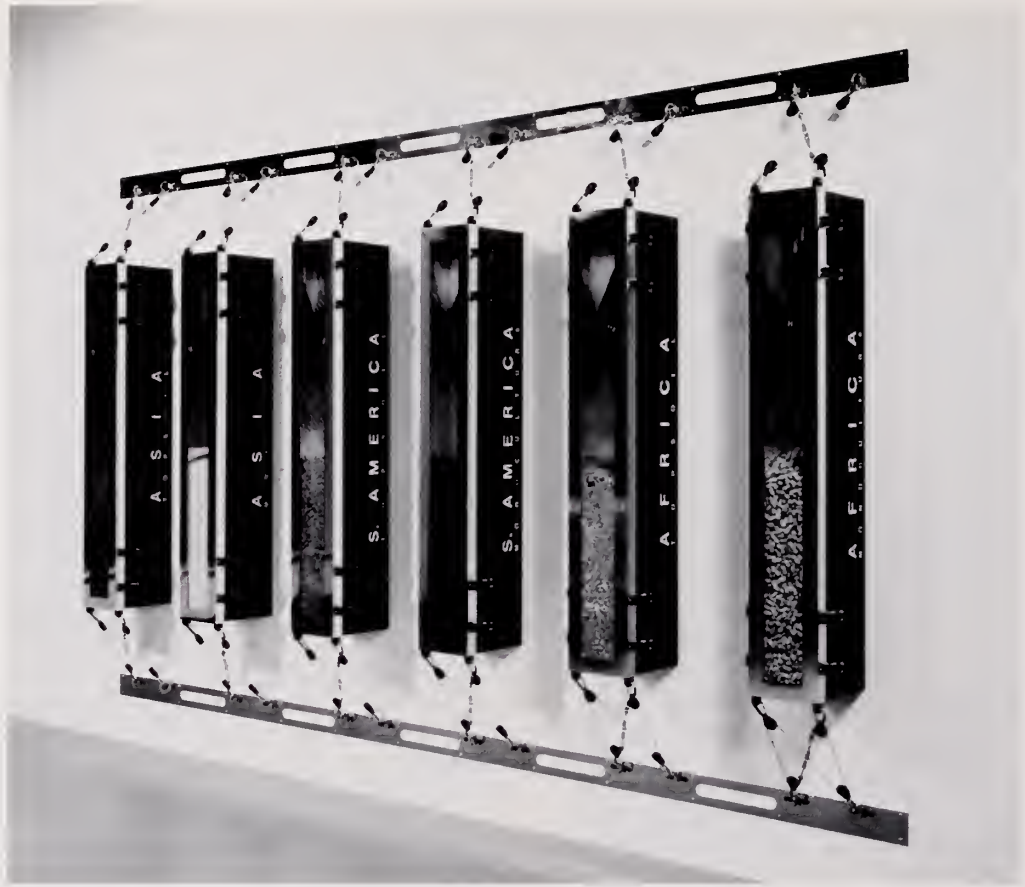
Ashley Bickertan's *Minimalism's Evil Orthadaxy Manaculture's Tatalitarian Aesthetic #2* (1990) displays rice, coffee, and peanuts representing the manocultures of Asia, South America, and Africa, alang with tapsoil samples from each continent. The materials are encased in six pristine pillars of black anadized steel and glass and restrained by cables to a wall maunt, which serve as high-tech bondage gear that bath subjugates and entambs natural assets. Bickerton here acts out a wish ta fulfill an obsessive fantasy of control and domination of nature through containment and repetition. Within the sterile confinement of the receptacles, differences between natural materials became superfluaus, as each natural element is rendered utterly impatent by its isalation in identical steel-and-glass units. Sealed in these slick, airtight "packages," the elements lase their value as usable gaads, serving only as signs far cammodities that demonstrate pawer ond contral thraugh awnership. The visual sterility af the packaged manacultures suggests their incapacity to functian as foodstuffs and emphasizes haw "third warld" resaurces are tronsformed inta "first warld" cammodities.

The warks af Peter Hapkins deal with waste, the other side of consumption. In *Eight Staps on a Thirty Faat Section* (1989), Hopkins photographically documents the collection of garboge from eight spots along a thirty-foot stretch of freeway. The garbage is ralled up in a canvos and stored in a bin (*Boxed Thirty Foot Pour*, 1989), displayed alongside the photographs of

Vincent Shine, *Untitled (Long-stem Seedling)*, 1989

the sites fram which the garbage was taken. Hapkins makes reference ta Rabert Smithsan's work of the late 1960s by using Smithson's "site/nan-site" strategy of dacumenting and displacing materials fram a specific noturol site into a gallery enviranment. The allusion ta Smithsan functions as a historical paint af reference that accentuates the urgency of current environmental problems: in both the "nan-site" af the gallery and the real "site" in the external world, garbage naw accupies the position that natural abjects once held. Hopkins uses canvas, o sign denoting cultural develapment, to contain garbage samples that we in fact cannat cantain. The refuse itself is not visible, but its contours can be made out underneath the ralled canvas. Hapkins plays off the same type of contral that ather works use vis-ò-vis notural moterials, but his reference is ta the present state of disposable culture. The artist's canvas becomes just another scrap that fills our homogenized vista or our landfills. The unodulterated uniformity of our waste attests to the consistency of our experience of consumptian.

Claire Pentecost's *Museum of Natural History* (1989–90) represents an appositional relationship af humans ta animals. Pentecost works with square panels mounted several inches oway from the wall in a highly structured grid format of eight vertical rows of eight panels each. The front side of each square is coated with a glue derived fram animal hide ond stoined with black and white pigment. Mounted ta the bock side of each square is a photograph of an animal, taken fram the dioramas at the American Museum of Natural History in New York. Repeated in each vertical row is the imoge of o different animal. The onimal images are reflected in mirrars mounted on the wall behind each row af panels, and in order ta see them the viewer must negotiate the correct angle. This transmutation of the natural into a dead image ar a



Ashley Bickerton, *Minimolism's Evil Orthodoxy Monoculture's Totolitorion Aesthetic #2*, 1990

product discloses the noture of our relotionship to onimols, our treotment of them os exploitoble resources. The hierorchy becomes opporent through the dynomics of power inherent in the oct of looking: the octive humon goze structures o position of dominonce over the object of the goze. But this implicit control is mode problemotic by the need to negotiote the proper ongle ond by the foct thot viewers' ottempts ot looking ore olso reflected bock in the mirrors.

The works here, which oscillote between control ond loss of control, signol the crisis in our obility to understond ond experience noture. In the work of Shine and Bickerton such on exocting control is exercised thot noture is preserved os on ortifoct. The control of noture through this process of preservotion is symptomotic of the homogenizotion ond consequent onesthetizing effect of o technologicol culture. Hopkins ond Pentecost undo the unyielding structure of control by introducing elements of dynomic controdiction. The disruption of control mirrors our overuse ond obuse of noturol resources, o situotion thot connot be contoined ond thot hos globol ecologicol romificotions.

Information Value:

The Art of Environmental Activism

Helen Molesworth

Against the backdrop of on environmental crisis, contemporory culture in general is experiencing a resurgence af attentiveness to nature, which is increasingly evident in the media and in palitical attention to environmental issues. A new branch of philasaphy, "land ethics," proposes that we are marally responsible for our treatment of the Earth. As the philosopher Aldo Leopold hos said, "The land ethic simply enlarges the baundary af the community to include sails, waters, plants, and animols, or collectively: the land." Similarly, "Gaia," o scientific theary which developed the concept of "planet management," insists thot oll earth processes are inextricably linked in a cycle af cause and effect. In the words of Richard Lavelack, the faunder of Gaia, "the entire range of living matter on Earth, from whales to viruses, con be regarded as o single entity. . . ."

Several of the ortists in this exhibition—Mark Dian and William Schefferine, Patricia Thornley, and Hachivi Edgor Heap of Birds—situate their work in this matrix of sociol concern and responsibility. Their wark breaks the hermeticism of art, and they resist the nihilism of the postmadern cancept that reality is now anly o media image. Instead, these artists didactically implicate the viewer in o lorger culturol system, demanding active engagement both in the ortwark and in the environmental crisis in general.

This position of activism is achieved lorgely through the use af texts. A text requires a reader far completian; as the French literary theorist Raland Borthes has written, "a text's unity lies not in its origin but in its destination." Here the viewer/reader must assume an active position, one equivalent to that of the artist. The incarporation af text consequently creates a dialogue between artist and viewer. Informative ar poetic, text con communicate alternative forms of infarmatian.

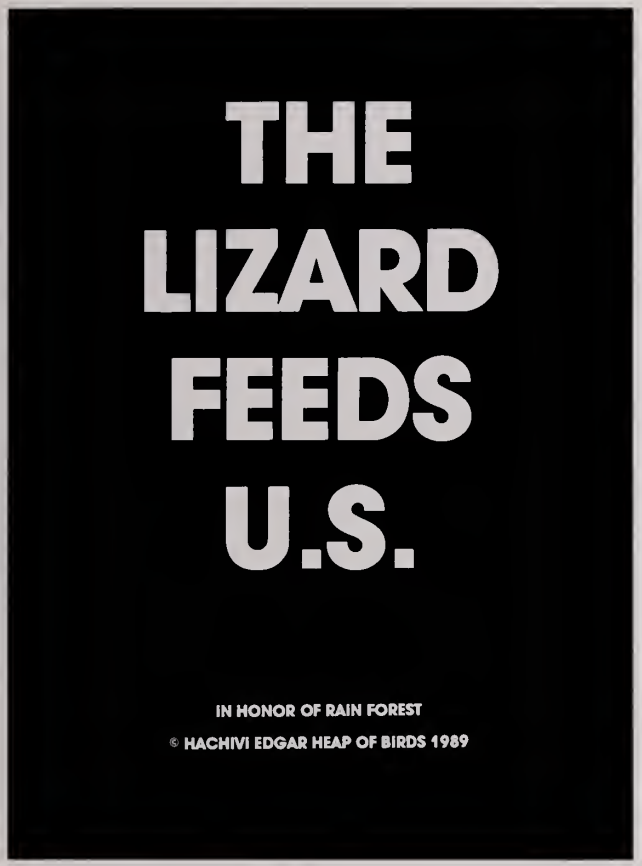
In Christy Rupp's *99.44% Forgatten* (1990), twa life-size elephant tusks fabricated entirely out of plastic bottles are displayed as if in o natural history museum. A whitewash of paint over the tusks obscures mast af the text, leaving only the Ivary Saap laga prominently visible. The sign "Ivary" emerges and recedes, familiar and unfamiliar, as if mirroring our semiconsciousness about the environmental crisis. Rupp implies that our desire for purity and cleonliness has been partly caused by the praliferatian of toxic cleaning substances in nanbiadegradable containers. She also links the hoarding of precious objects to the endangerment of o species, in this case, elephants slaughtered far their ivory tusks.

The destructive rale of the West in the global ecosystem is further explored in the work of Hochivi Edgar Heap of Birds. Like Rupp, Heop of Birds actively negates the rarified art abject through his chaice af moterials. In *In Honor of Rain Forest* (1989), three black-and-white photostots with three fragmentary texts are pinned ta the wall. Their urgent messages

Hachivi Edgar Heap of Birds, *In Honor of Rain Forest*, 1989

proclaim the imperiled state of the tropical rain forest in sparse and stringent language that requires deciphering. This deciphering ultimately touches on the cause-and-effect relationship between our daily activities and the demise of the rain forest. For example, "Burning Debt Burning Burgers" and "Food for the Brick Prick" relate our budget deficit and our appetite for red meat to a pattern of overconsumption that has accelerated deforestation. In order to compete in "first world" markets, less industrialized countries like Brazil are forced to strip the forest to make export products and to convert the deforested land into more "profitable" ventures such as cattle ranching. "The Lizard Feeds U.S." alludes to the loss of species diversity as a by-product of this destruction. Both Rupp and Heap of Birds use a certain ambiguity to question one-sided or merely statistical types of information as well as to initiate an active dialogue with the viewer.

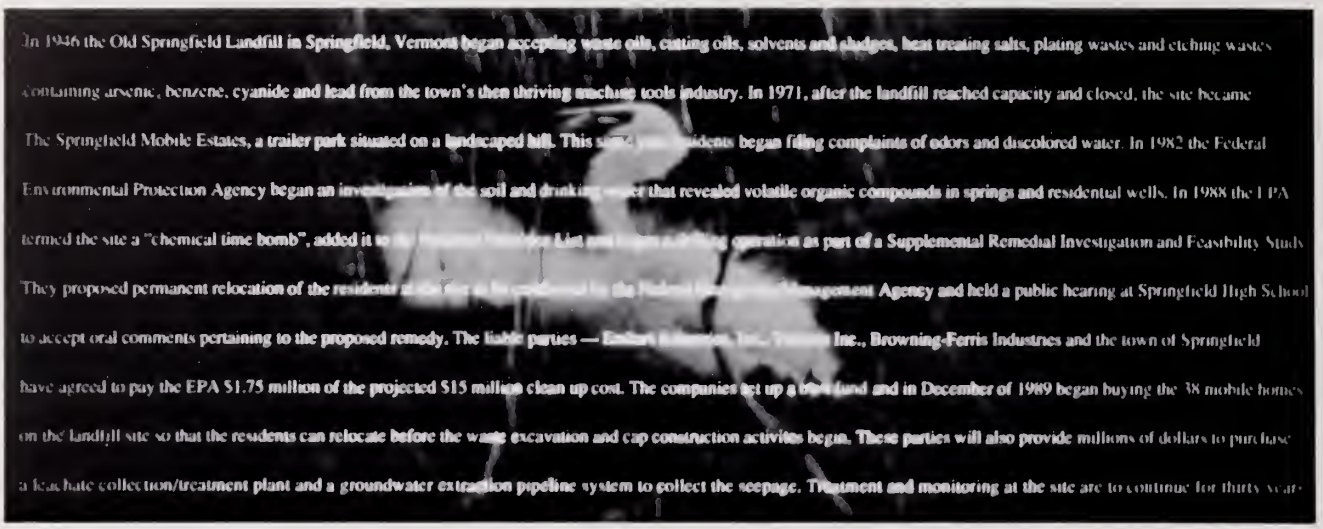
The photographs of Richard Misrach function differently. Firmly rooted in the tradition of documentary photography, his series *The Pit* (1987–89) records the governmental cover-up of the nuclear radiation responsible for the deaths of domestic farm animals near an atomic test site in Nevada (the "pit" is the site where government officials instructed farmers to dump the carcasses). Very little interpretation is required here.



The monumental photographs of the dead cattle and the straightforward text about the cover-up, although informative, anesthetize the viewer. The event is already complete so that we are not given any room for action; overwhelmed by the horror of the event, we turn away from the work.

The effect of media sensationalism and dramatic photojournalism on the information we receive about the environment is critically examined in Patricia Tharnley's installation. Her work sits in a darkened area of the gallery, dormant until activated by the push of a button, at which point it is transformed into a media spectacle. A slide show of text and images accompanied by music is projected onto the surface of a white fiberglass lawn swan sitting in front of a wall constructed of split metal pipes. The text tells of a trailer park built on top of a landfill; the projected images are of flying geese. While the lawn swan speaks of the dream of home ownership, the flying geese allude to those who inhabit more transitional housing such as trailer parks. This element of class, perpetually overlooked by the media, is foregrounded in Tharnley's work as a way to further complicate the issue of waste, for industrial and nuclear by-products are dumped every day into poor communities in the United States or exported to third world countries. After sixty seconds, this "media moment" ceases and the work returns to a state of "hibernation." By using devices of duration and distraction, Tharnley raises the question of access to information and the terms under which it is given and received. One cannot absorb all of the text in one reading. The experience is thus timed, which places us in a position of power, since we can control the amount of information received; yet the arrangement also exposes how our access to information is actually highly controlled.

The need for alternative types of information and informed dialogue underlies the site-specific installation *Under the Verdant Carpet: The Dreams of Mount Koch* (1990) by Mark Dion and William Schefferine. Contained within the familiar urban landscape of dumpsters, car tires, and garbage drums is a miniature tropical rain forest. The latter has come to signify ecological crisis, and its inclusion among elements of our own familiar landscape reveals the way we tend to displace environmental problems onto foreign sites. This displacement distracts us from creating strategies to solve our own waste problems or understand how the two problems are intertwined.



Patricia Thornley, *Untitled*, 1990

Maunt Kach is the primary dumping site far New Yark City's waste, and it is projected that in the near future it will be the highest peak an the northeastern caast. The dream af Mount Koch covered by lush greenery is undaubtedly a utapian one, yet it has a realistic and even pragmatic side. The garbage cantainers are covered with quatatians, graphs, phatagraphs, and diagrams which pravide infarmatian, sametimes cantradictary, that indicates the camplexity of the lacal, national, and glabal eco-crisis. Included in this barrage af information are suggestians far bath persanal and gavernmental regenerative recycling strategies. These multifarious saurces and types af knawledge are meant to empower the viewer, praviding both a plethora af informatian and a cantext for debate.

All these warks lay the groundwork for enviranmental activism. But the dissemination af infarmation is anly a beginning. The works alsa give us an apportunity to questian our relationship ta, and the importance af, nature in aur lives and in aur perceptians af aurselves. The answers will enable us to restructure a society in accordance with enviranmental realities.

Works in the Exhibition

All dimensions are in inches;
height precedes width precedes depth.

Ashley Bickerton (b. 1959)

Minimalism's Evil Orthodoxy
Manoculture's Totalitarian
Aesthetic #2, 1990
Steel, concrete, glass, rubber, plastic, soil, rice, coffee, and peanuts,
96 × 156 × 12¼
Sannabend Gallery, New York

Clegg (b. 1957) and
Guttmonn (b. 1957)

Untitled #11, 1987
Cibachrome print, 45 × 66
Collection of Samuel and
Rannie Heyman

Petoh Coyne (b. 1953)

Untitled, 1989
Mixed media, 111 × 60 × 63
Jack Shainman Gallery, New York

Michael Cuddington (b. 1953)

Central Valley, 1989
Oil on plywood, 38 × 152
Collection of the artist

Brian D'Amoto (b. 1962)

Tomb for Female and Male Butterfly, 1989
Ultramarine powdered pigment, gold powder, butterfly specimens, and aluminum display case, 34 × 22 × 3
Collection of the artist

Mork Dion (b. 1961) and
William Schefferine (b. 1959)

Under the Verdant Carpet: The Dreams of Maunt Koch, 1990
Mixed-media, site-specific installation, dimensions variable
American Fine Arts, Co., New York

Loura Emrick (b. 1960)

Stolen Horizon, 1990
Car windshield and side window with sun reflective screen,
17½ × 72 × 2 overall
Collection of the artist

Jock Goldstein (b. 1945)

Untitled, 1985
Acrylic on canvas, 84 × 84
Collection of B.Z. and
Michael Schwartz

April Gornik (b. 1953)

One, 1986
Oil on linen, 72 × 98
Collection of the artist; courtesy
Edward Tharp Gallery, New York

Hochivi Edgor Heap of Birds
(b. 1954)

In Honor of Rain Forest, 1989
Three photostats, 42 × 56 each
Collection of the artist

Peter Hopkins (b. 1955)

Boxed Thirty Foot Pour, from the *CAPITAL PROJECT*, 1989
Bleached, rolled, and glued canvas with objects, 9 × 98 × 7
American Fine Arts, Co., New York

Eight Steps on a Thirty Foot Section, from the *CAPITAL PROJECT*, 1989
Eight Cibachrome prints,
20 × 17¾ each
American Fine Arts, Co., New York

Richard Misroch (b. 1949)

Dead Animals #1, from the series *The Pit*, 1987–89
Ektacolor plus print, 20 × 24
Fraenkel Gallery, San Francisco, and fotoman, inc.

Dead Animals #279, from the series *The Pit*, 1987–89
Ektacolor plus print, 20 × 24
Fraenkel Gallery, San Francisco, and fotoman, inc.

Dovid Nyzio (b. 1958)

Farm, 1989
Butterfly wings, honeycomb board, and glass, 86 × 50
Collection of Edward R. Downe, Jr.; courtesy Postmasters Gallery, New York

Cloire Pentecost (b. 1958)

Museum of Natural History, 1989–90
Eight panels of wood, hide glue with pigment, photographs, plexiglass, and mirrors, 72 × 8 × 4 each
Collection of the artist

John Pfohl (b. 1939)

PFV-2-A/Fantasy Island/ABC-TV, 1981
Platinum-palladium print and text,
14 × 11
Janet Borden, Inc., New York

PFV-3-A/Mosterpiece Theater: Sunset Song/PBS-TV, 1981
Plotinum-pollodium print ond text, 14 × 11
Jonet Borden, Inc., New York

PFV-7-A/Masterpiece Theoter: Therese Raquin/PBS-TV, 1981
Plotinum-polladium print and text, 14 × 11
Jonet Borden, Inc., New York

Alexis Rockman (b. 1962)

The Dynomics of Power, 1989
Oil on canvas, 80 × 68
Collection of Arthur and Corol Goldberg

Christy Rupp (b. 1949)

99.44% Forgotten, 1990
Two pieces of welded steel and plastic bottles, 95 × 38 × 14 each
P.P.O.W., New York

Vincent Shine (b. 1962)

Untitled (Blue Stomen), 1989
Neaprene, ethylene vinyl ocetote, acetate, steel, epoxy, plexigloss, ocrylic point, acrylic pigment, and cyanacrylote esther, 7 × 4 × 3
Private collection; courtesy Thea Westreich Associotes, New York

Untitled (Long-stem Seedling), 1989
Neoprene, ethylene vinyl ocetate, ocetate, steel, ocrylic point, plexigloss, ond cyanocrylate ester, 12 × 3¼ × 3½
Collection of Eileen and Michael Cohen

Untitled (Mulberry Branch), 1989
Neoprene, ethylene vinyl ocetote, steel, ocrylic point, plexigloss, and cyanacrylate ester, 2 × 4 × 3
Wolff Gollery, New York

Untitled (Popyrus #2), 1989
Neoprene, ethylene vinyl ocetote, ocetate, steel, acrylic paint, plexigloss, ond cyonocrylote ester, 14½ × 5 × 4
Collection of Mr. and Mrs. Edword W. Rose, III

Untitled (Small Seedling), 1989
Neoprene, ethylene vinyl ocetate, steel, ocrylic point, plexiglass, polyolefin, and synthetic acrylic polymer, 8 × 4 × 5¼
Collection of Knight Landesman; courtesy Robbin Lockett Gallery, Chicago

Michelle Stuart (b. 1940)

Brookings Herbarium #18, 1988–89
Encoustic, pigment, and plants, 12 × 12
Fowbush Gallery, New York

Brookings Herbarium #33, 1988–89
Encaustic, pigment, ond plants, 12 × 12
Fowbush Gallery, New York

Brookings Herborium, #37, 1988–89
Encaustic, pigment, and plants, 12 × 12
Fowbush Gallery, New York

Brookings Herbarium #41, 1988–89
Encoustic, pigment, ond plants, 12 × 12
Fowbush Gallery, New York

Brookings Herborium #45, 1988–89
Encoustic, pigment, and plonts, 12 × 12
Fowbush Gollery, New York

Brookings Herborium #75, 1988–89
Encaustic, pigment, and plonts, 12 × 12
Fawbush Gallery, New York

Broakings Herbarium #89, 1988–89
Encaustic, pigment, ond plonts, 12 × 12
Fawbush Gallery, New York

Brookings Herbarium #94, 1988–89
Encaustic, pigment, and plonts, 12 × 12
Fowbush Gallery, New York

Brookings Herbarium #99, 1988–89
Encaustic, pigment, and plants, 12 × 12
Fawbush Gallery, New York

Patricia Thornley (b. 1961)

Untitled, 1990
Multimedia installotion, 70 × 168 × 48
Audio by the ortist and A. Leroy
Collection of the artist

Photograph Credits
Ken Schles (Goldstein, Rockmon)
Michoel Tropeo (Bickerton)

Whitney Museum of American Art
Downtown at Federal Reserve Plaza
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New York, New York 10038
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Gallery Hours

Monday–Friday, 11:00–6:00
Free admission

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Monday, Wednesday, Friday, 12:30
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